



The Component Plans Visitor Experience Plan

All kinds of people use the Canal Road Scenic Byway corridor - from daily commuters to single-time visitors. This plan, however, is focused on leisure travelers along the byway, whether they come from around the metropolitan region, other parts of the United States, or foreign countries. This plan outlines what visitors may expect when they visit the byway and what kind of experiences may be available.

Visitor Profiles

The Canal Road Scenic Byway experience is best enjoyed by leisure visitors. They can be of any age; they can be alone, in families, or in groups. But they should be people who appreciate natural values and American history. Visitors to the Avenue should also be willing to explore beyond the confines of their personal vehicles and to experience the byway by other means - by motor coach, on foot, by bicycle or canoe - even in a mule-drawn canal boat! The Canal Road Byway offers the best of several worlds: you can spend an afternoon enjoying nature and spend the evening enjoying a candlelit meal in one of Georgetown's fine restaurants. Among the expected visitors to the Canal Road Scenic Byway corridor are the following:

- Local residents seeking new ways to enjoy their city and different things to do close to home.
- Local residents hosting relatives and friends.
- People who had already planned to come to Washington and find the byway an interesting addition to their itinerary.
- National or international business travelers taking a break from work or enjoying a holiday.
- History buffs who want to learn about the American past while having fun.
- Runners, joggers, and walkers; roller-bladers and people on bicycles.

- Naturalists and people who enjoy fishing, bird-watching, and geologic exploration.
- People who enjoy canoeing or boating.
- Individuals and families seeking recreation in the midst of a major metropolitan area.

Visitor Needs & Expectations

User facilities should be available for travelers on a National Scenic Byway; such needs, services, and amenities are also specified by the DC Scenic Byways Program. Among these needs are food, gasoline, bathrooms, telephones, lodging, automated banking machines, interpretive features, bicycle lanes, pedestrian facilities, recreational opportunities, and multi-modal connections.

By and large, businesses that provide these needs, services, and amenities - such as restaurants, gas stations, hotels, banks, and tour providers - are already in place. Businesses, service providers, and managing agencies within the byway corridor have much experience in dealing with visitors.

Visitors should reasonably be expected to want a safe, inviting environment where they can have fun, learn something, and find something new and different to experience. It should be reasonable for byway visitors to expect that they will be able to find many good places to eat in Georgetown or snacks at Fletcher's Boat House (when it is open in season). Parking in Georgetown can be difficult, but there is a large lot at Fletcher's, where restrooms are also available. People may expect to find rental facilities, and they can find bicycles and rowboats for rent at Fletcher's, as well as at Jack's Boathouse under the Key Bridge.

Best Times to Drive the Byway

- Low- traffic holidays, such as Veterans Day and New Years Day
- Weekends
- Mid-day during the week
- Off-peak months (July & August; December, January & February)



Variable lanes at peak traffic times intrude upon the visitor's experience

Minimizing Intrusions

Canal Road Scenic Byway should be a route that is easy to follow, safe, and comfortable. However, this byway plan fully recognizes that Canal Road is a major commuter route with high traffic volumes, a proliferation of traffic signs, and even some reversible lanes at peak traffic times. Potentially confusing intersections and lane controls also add complications to the experience.

People touring the Canal Road Scenic Byway - especially those unaccustomed to city traffic - may find that these conditions intrude upon their experience. Therefore, this plan promotes a multi-modal experience of the Canal Road Byway. Visitors are encouraged to get out of their personal vehicles to fully savor all this byway has to offer; thus, they avoid the potential difficulties of driving.

In addition, other physical elements may intrude upon visitors' experience. This plan supports restrictions on billboards, large cellular phone or other communications towers, and other potentially unsightly features and projects within the corridor.

Finally, personal safety should always be a consideration in byway planning. Areas along the byway - including parts of Georgetown, along Canal Road below Georgetown University, and in the vicinity of the Canal Road pedestrian and bicycle tunnel - have experienced crime in the past. Visitors need to be reminded to keep safety in mind, just as they would in any unfamiliar place.

Interpretation & Education Strategy

The Canal Road Scenic Byway should be an interesting, intellectually engaging experience for visitors and residents alike, and, through links with other city byways (Pennsylvania Avenue and Rock Creek Parkway) provide a rich and continuous visitor experience of the Nation's Capital. But to be fully enjoyed, this

experience requires interpretation. Byway users need to understand what they are seeing and experiencing. The significance of resources - and the themes of the byway that link resources together - must be articulated before they can be appreciated.

Many existing attractions - particularly those administered by the National Park Service - are already well-interpreted. Visitors to the city can easily obtain interpretive materials (e.g., on the Internet) and take tours of such major attractions as the Chesapeake & Ohio National Historic Park. Also, various organizations provide tour planning information for the Washington, DC, region on the Internet. Notable is the Web site for the Washington, DC Convention and Tourism Corporation (www.washington.org), which provides information on restaurants and hotels in the city. In addition, organizations such as the DC Heritage Tourism Coalition develop and promote historical and cultural trails in the city. Georgetown has a new Visitors Center on M Street sponsored by the Georgetown Partnership, the community's business improvement district organization.

Additional work is needed to develop additional interpretive materials for Canal Road Scenic Byway, particularly materials that identify the many resources, explicate the themes, and tell the story of the entire corridor.

Recommendations

- Apply for additional federal funding to prepare an interpretation plan for Canal Road Scenic Byway. This plan should emphasize the historic and natural resources of the byway.

- Based on the interpretive plan, develop texts for interpretive signs and create and install these signs on and

near the byway. Signs should build upon the wayfinding and heritage trail signs being installed elsewhere in Washington.

- Conduct a scenic view analysis to more closely identify all the important locations from which users of the byway obtain scenic views, as well as any features that detract from the experience. This analysis should identify specific management actions that would enhance views, such as the selective thinning of trees or the removal of overhead power lines or other intrusive features. Designate the identified views as "protected resources."

- Support efforts to provide interpretation of the natural resources and geology of the corridor.

- Take steps to address the heavy vehicular traffic and the general unfamiliarity tourists may have with the city and its many sites away from the National Mall. This may involve:

- Coordination with existing information centers of the DC Chamber of Commerce and such future ones as the City Museum of Washington, DC to ensure that byway information is readily available.

- Providing links between these visitor centers and other key locations in the city (Metro or special buses), downtown and West End and Georgetown hotels, and the Convention Center.

- Development of tours that originate from the C&O National Historic Park Visitor Center.

- Coordinate with the Georgetown Partnership to provide scenic byway information at the Partnership's Visitors Center.

- Design and install interpretive displays and kiosks that provide information about the scenic byway at its resources. Suggested locations include:

- Fletcher's Boat House area.
- Along the Potomac River, between the end of the Capital Crescent Trail and Washington Harbor
- At the Clara Barton Parkway entrance.
- On M Street near Key Bridge.
- In a new area in the vicinity of the intersection of Foxhall and Canal Roads.

- Explore design possibilities for a gateway to the District on the western end. Make the entrance to Washington at the DC-Maryland line a more distinctive location, using materials compatible with those found in local, historic structures and native plant species.

- Enhance the Georgetown connections to the C&O Canal by enhancing signage, interpretation, and parking accommodations. Enhance the linkage between Georgetown canal features and other "upstream" canal features; study the feasibility of a shuttle between the Georgetown Visitors Center and Fletcher's Boat House.

- Investigate the possibility of improving the appearance of the service station at M and 29th Street and adding additional visitor services.

- Post information on DC's Internet site, explaining the attractions, amenities, and safety conditions of the Canal Road Scenic Byway.



Create an interpretive area near Fletcher's Boathouse



Interpret natural resources



The Component Plans

Tourism, Marketing & Promotion Plan

In marketing terms, the ideal visitor experience is a “product” that can be “purchased” by “consumers” through “sales.” Marketing and promotion follow directly from the visitor experience plan: first, the byway organization develops a product - the Canal Road Byway visitor experience - then comes marketing, which involves selling this product to visitors, and promotion, which involves public relations and spreading the good word about the byway. This section provides ideas for the marketing and promotion of tourism and related economic development.

Tourism Plan

Washington, DC, is located within a reasonable driving distance of more than 50 percent of the Nation’s population. According to the National Capital Planning Commission, tourism is expected to double over the next 50 years. And, according to the Washington, DC Convention and Tourism Corporation, Washington, DC ranks among the top ten US cities visited by international travelers.

The Canal Road Byway market is directed primarily at visitors who are already likely to be drawn to Washington, DC but stay longer to experience the byway corridor. It is not expected that designation of Canal Road under the National Scenic Byways program will, by itself, result in substantial increases in tourism. Therefore, to a large extent, the plan to promote tourism along the Canal Road Scenic Byway capitalizes on the existing tourism framework. This plan anticipates coordination with visitor service plans and tourism plans by the National Park Service, Washington Convention and Tourism Corporation, DC Heritage Tourism Coalition, District of Columbia Chamber of Commerce, Greater Washington Ibero American Chamber of Commerce, and the Greater Washington Board of Trade.

Marketing and Promotion

An image-building plan is useful to sell the visitor experience “product.” It also helps foster support and recognition from both residents and visitors. The plan recognizes that not all stakeholders will have the same opinion regarding the desirability of attracting additional tourists. The targeted market, however, is primarily those leisure travelers who would already visit Washington, DC and, because they wish to experience the Canal Road Scenic Byway, stay for a longer period.

The strategy to promote the Canal Road Scenic Byway can include development of paid advertising, public relations, promotions, and interpretive publications. Activities based on this plan should ensure that there is a product (or products) along the Canal Road Scenic Byway for visitors to experience and enjoy. Businesses, community organizations, and cultural and heritage groups are encouraged to participate in and support promotional activities that will bring visitors into their neighborhoods and businesses. Special events can be developed to coordinate or complement events in local communities. Participants should ensure that the public knows about the product at the local, regional, and national levels.

The Internet is an important source of information for visitors in trip-planning. A page on the DDOT Web site is dedicated to the DC Byways Program, including Canal Road. This Web site can be augmented with additional information from this plan and links to related Web sites including the DC Heritage Tourism Coalition and Washington Convention and Tourism Corporation. The National Park Service also provides extensive descriptions of the sites and lands under their administration.

Web Sites for Organizations that Promote Tourism in Washington, DC

Washington Convention and Tourism Corporation - www.washington.org

DC Heritage Tourism Coalition - www.dcheritage.org

District of Columbia Chamber of Commerce - www.dcchamber.org

Greater Washington Ibero American Chamber of Commerce - www.iberochamber.org

Greater Washington Board of Trade - www.bot.org